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Four Israelis Are Named in U.S. Spy Case

Friendship Doesn't Always Deter Espionage

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IN a sense, good diplomats are good spies, even when posted to friendly countries. If they are doing their jobs, they ferret out confidential information that would be of value back home. Sometimes the focus is super-secret intelligence about defense or politics — but not always. The home government might have a keen interest in, say, classified details of a large agricultural deal or strategy in upcoming trade talks.

When the Justice Department named a former Israeli diplomat in New York and three other Israelis last week as members of a spy ring that had spent tens of thousands of dollars to buy American secrets, not everyone was surprised.

The Israelis were implicated by an American naval analyst, Jonathan Jay Pollard, who confessed in a plea bargain that he had provided the espionage operation with stacks of classified documents. The Israelis were not indicted, but prosecutors have not ruled out criminal charges against them.

Jeffrey T. Richelson, a professor at American University who specializes in intelligence matters, said that while most of Washington's friends might not mount such extensive espionage efforts, spying "appears to go on by everybody against everybody, including allies." In the Pollard case, Israeli intelligence agents were apparently trying to learn about the naval fleets of moderate Arab nations; the United States does not routinely provide some of those details to Israel.

In other cases, intelligence agencies want to be able to predict policy shifts in an allied government or double check information gathered elsewhere.

The United States has long monitored friendly governments. In February 1985, Spain ousted two American diplomats, and news reports in Madrid said they were caught snapping pictures of antennas atop the Presidential offices, apparently trying to learn how the Spanish Government transmitted secret communications. In 1979, South Africa expelled three employees of the United States Embassy who had fitted the ambassador's plane with spy cameras.

Nor is Israel immune to American surveillance. An American ship equipped with sensitive listening devices was sent to the Gulf of Sinai during Israel's six-day war with Egypt in 1967; it was bombed by Israel, which de-

scribed the attack as accidental.

Last week's developments in the Pollard case at least temporarily embarrassed the Israeli Government, which has said the spy ring was a renegade operation disbanded after Mr. Pollard's arrest. By week's end, a number of Administration officials were saying privately that they hoped the case would quickly be forgotten.

In an interview, the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, William H. Webster, said espionage operations conducted by friendly nations in the United States were "not a growing concern." He continued: "We don't approach our friends the same way that we do those who are hostile to us. We don't have the resources to do that, nor do I think we would wish to do that. Where we find our friends are getting overly aggressive in the acquisition of information, then we take appropriate steps."

The amount of spying by friendly governments often depends on the intimacy of their intelligence services, and the insecurity of the nation doing the spying. Unlike most leading American allies, Israel has legitimate fears about its survival. "The Israelis always have their backs to the wall, and they do what they have to do," said George Carver, a former official of the Central Intelligence Agency who is now associated with Georgetown University. A 1979 study by the C.I.A. found that a chief objective of Israeli intelligence was the "collection of information on secret U.S. policy or decisions, if any, concerning Israel" and the "collection of scientific intelligence in the U.S. and other developed countries."

By comparison, the British Government would not have the same concerns about survival, and the relationship of British intelligence agencies to their American counterparts could not be much closer. But it is still widely assumed that Britain monitors some American military communications. And in the early days of World War II, Britain did not hesitate to collect American intelligence covertly. "From 1939 to 1941, they were in it up to their eyeballs," Mr. Carver said.

For some nations, the goal of spying is not survival, but profit. Intelligence analysts say many Western diplomats identified as commercial attachés are, in effect, commercial spies, attempting to gather detail about business deals and trade negotiations that might affect pocketbooks back home.

Last week, the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Strom Thurmond, Republican of South Carolina, asked for an investigation of charges that Asian governments had obtained through unauthorized channels information about the American position on textile negotiations. "I am personally angered and deeply disturbed by what I consider to be at the very least a breach of trust and perhaps a violation of law," he said. The Justice Department is considering his request.